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ABSTRACT

This bulletin answers questions concerning grading, graduation requirements, and awarding of diplomas to students with disabilities in Montana. Presented in a question-and-answer format, the guide is based upon letters from the Office of Special Education Programs and Office for Civil Rights concerning the interpretation of federal statutes. First, concerning grades, the guide addresses use of modified grades, exclusion of a student from grading in a general education class, collaboration of general and special education teachers in grading, and disclosure of the student's special education status. Second, concerning grades in class rankings and honor rolls, the guide considers inclusion of grades in special education classes in schoolwide standings and weighted grading systems. Third, concerning graduation, questions are answered about the placement committee, procedural safeguards, and eligibility for services until the age of 21. Fourth, concerning diplomas, questions address diploma eligibility and wording on diplomas received by a special education students. References to relevant legislation and regulations are included. Appended are sample diplomas and report cards for special education students. (DB)

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ED 460 462

Grades, Graduation, and Diplomas
Special Education Bulletin.

B. Bird

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SPECIAL EDUCATION BULLETIN

GRADES, GRADUATION, AND DIPLOMAS

JULY, 1995

Many questions regarding graduation of students receiving special education have been raised by administrators and other school staff. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is silent with respect to these issues. Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act prohibits discrimination in the implementation of grading policies, setting of graduation requirements, and awarding of diplomas.

The Board of Public Education and local school districts have the authority to set graduation standards, grading policies and conditions for awarding diplomas as long as those policies do not violate civil rights. This bulletin, which is designed in a question/answer format, is based upon several letters from the Office of Special Education Programs and Office of Civil Rights. For specific cites, please call 444-4402.

GRADES

1. May a student with a disability who receives special education accommodations in a general education classroom be given modified grades?

YES. Students with disabilities enrolled in general education classes for the purpose of learning that subject matter or working on the objectives identified in the IEP should receive grades as outlined in the IEP.

If grades are the standard used for granting credit in a general education class, then students with disabilities enrolled in that class for credit shall receive grades.

GRADES

Grading modifications for students with disabilities in the general education classroom should be outlined in the IEP.

GRADES

Alternate grading systems are appropriate only if they are offered to all students, not just students with disabilities.

Grades provide a measure that a student has or has not successfully mastered the subject matter in a particular subject area and provide the IEP team with information that will help make appropriate educational decisions.

Alternative grading systems are appropriate as long as the school district ensures that the grading policies and practices of the district are not discriminatory. For example, a school district may offer a pass/fail grading system for students receiving special education in general education classes only if the pass/fail grading system is available to all students regardless of disability. If an asterisk (*) indicates "individualized learner objectives," then the use of the asterisk would have to be applied to all students, not just those receiving special education.

2. May a student with a disability enrolled in a general education class for reasons other than mastery of the course content (example, learning social skills), be excluded from the class grading and evaluated on specific objectives on the IEP?

YES. Students with disabilities enrolled in a general education class for no credit as part of the IEP would not be graded in the content area, but receive grading or evaluation based upon criteria outlined in the IEP.

3. Can a general education teacher and a special education teacher assign the grade for a student with a disability in a general education classroom?

YES. Grading special education students should be a collaborative effort between the general and special educator. The actual standards for grading should be addressed in the IEP. Local school district policy and administrative practices determine which teacher actually is responsible for compiling the grade.

GRADING

Grading students within an inclusive environment should be a collaborative effort between the general and special educator.

4. Can classes be identified as special education classes on the high school student's transcript to indicate that the student has had a modified curriculum in general class?

NO. Words such as "English Essentials," or "Practical Math Applications" or other descriptive phrases must be used. Words such as "Special Education English" or "Resource math" should not appear on the transcript.

5. Can asterisks or other symbols or codes be written on a high school student transcript to indicate that the student has had a modified curriculum in a general education class?

YES. Modifications or exceptions to the grading scale may be identified as long as the denotation of modifications or exceptions does not identify the student as having a disability or being in special education. An asterisk after the grade may denote that the student received modified grades or completed work at a lower grade level. However, the explanation of the asterisk on the transcript must not indicate the student's participation in special education. The school district must be careful in providing any information on the transcript which may later have a discriminatory impact on the student's admission to post-secondary educational institutions or future employment.

TRANSCRIPTS

Avoid- "Special Education Reading"
"Resource English"
"Special Education Math"

Use- "Level 1 English"
"Practical Math Applications"
"Basic Social Studies"
"General Science"
"Collaborative Algebra"
"Life Skills"

An asterisk (*) can be used on the transcripts to indicate a modified program. The statement should not make reference to participation in special education.

6. May a student with a disability or parent, when appropriate, disclose the student's participation in special education services to a post-secondary educational institution?

YES. Disclosure of information regarding a disability to post-secondary educational institutions and/or employers could be very beneficial to the student. Information used properly may lead to better programming and appropriate accommodations for the student.

It is up to the candidate for admission or applicant for employment to disclose relevant information regarding a disability. Information regarding a disability may be contained on the transcript *if* the parent or student with disabilities gives written consent for the information to be released to the post-secondary institution or employer. The parent or student with disabilities must know what is on the transcript and give consent specific to the information sent.

GRADES, CLASS RANKING AND HONOR ROLL

1. Must grades earned in special education classes or in general education classes with the support of special education services be included in schoolwide GPA standings? (This leads to a ranking of students by GPA for honor roll and college scholarship purposes).

YES. In determining GPA or class ranking, a school district may not arbitrarily exclude students receiving special education or assign the students a lower class ranking. A high school or junior high school honor roll policy may not use participation in special education as a basis for exclusion from the honor roll. Any policy and practice with regard to assigning students honor roll status must be developed and implemented district-wide so that a disparate application of the standard does not exist.

A school district policy may not use participation in special education and related services as a criteria to eliminate students from competition for valedictorian, salutatorian or class ranking for scholarships. Section 504 does not prohibit school districts from utilizing uniform standards for measuring academic achievement for educationally sound purposes, even though some students with disabilities may not be able to perform at higher levels. The selection procedures, however, must be based on objective criteria commensurate with the purpose of the ranking.

2. Can a school district implement a weighted grading system that arbitrarily assigns lower grade weights to all special education courses?

A school district may not arbitrarily assign the lowest weight in a weighted grading scale formula to all special education classes.

NO. A school district may not arbitrarily assign the lowest weight in a weighted grading scale formula to all special education classes. The school district may use a weighted grading system which assigns lower grade weights to special education courses as long as the lower weighting results from an assessment of actual differences in the difficulty of all courses including special education and general education classes. The academic distinctions must be based upon objective criteria closely related to the purpose of the

program and applied to all students equally without regard to disability. For purposes of determining grades, categorization of courses based solely on the status of the class as a special education class or the classification of the student as having a disability would violate Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act (Section 504).

When a school district's weighting system effectively precludes special education students from being placed on the honor roll, the school district shall provide students with disabilities the opportunity to earn awards and honors reflecting their efforts and achievement. The OPI technical assistance manual *Least Restrictive Environment* states that participation of a student with disabilities in a separate service or activity is permitted only when the nature or severity of the student's disability is such that the student is unable to enjoy or otherwise benefit from participation in the service or activity in which students without disabilities participate. Before providing separate services or activities, the district must consider reasonable modifications to the design of such services or activities in an effort to accommodate all students.

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM MEETING BEFORE GRADUATION

An IEP meeting is required to conduct a review of the IEP in an appropriate time before graduation to ensure requirements will be met and the goals and objectives in the IEP completed.

GRADUATION

1. Is an Individualized Education Program meeting required before a student with disabilities graduates from high school?

YES. An IEP meeting must be held to conduct a review of the student's IEP at an appropriate time before graduation to evaluate the student's progress toward graduation. The IEP team determines whether graduation requirements will be met and whether the goals and objectives in the IEP will be completed.

Rule 10.16.2703 ARM requires school districts to have procedures to ensure continuation of a free appropriate public education for students with disabilities when promoting or retaining students. Students shall be promoted or retained according to local educational criteria unless specific learner outcomes are waived in the student's IEP. The student shall be eligible for graduation from high school if the student has completed a prescribed course of study. A prescribed course of study shall have been completed when a student completes the goals on the IEP.

If a student's IEP has identified graduation on a specified date and the IEP team decides that the student has not met graduation requirements, written prior notice that the student will not meet graduation requirements must be given to the parent and student early enough so that parents may exercise their procedural safeguards including requesting a due process hearing. If the student or parents of the student requests a due process hearing, the impartial hearing officer would determine whether it is appropriate to graduate the student.

2. Are procedural safeguards required when a student with disabilities graduates from high school?

YES. High school graduation is considered a change in placement for a student who has a disability in that eligibility for special education and related services ceases upon granting a diploma. Since graduation ceases a student's access to special education programs, all of the procedural safeguards required under IDEA are in

effect including written notice and due process hearing procedures and must be given at the IEP meeting that evaluates whether the student has met graduation requirements.

Under Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act (Section 504), the school district must conduct an evaluation in accordance with 34 CFR 104.35(b) before any significant change in placement. For students with disabilities receiving services under Section 504, the evaluation team which designed the student's program must determine whether the student is eligible for graduation. Since graduation is a significant change in placement, written notice of procedural safeguards is required.

3. Can a student who has graduated from public high school receive special education services under IDEA until the age of 21?

All of the procedural safeguards required under IDEA are in effect including written notice and due process hearing procedures.

NO. High school graduation and granting a high school diploma signal the completion of the student's secondary education program. IDEA does not cover post-secondary school education. A student's eligibility for special education services may also end if the student no longer meets school district age qualifications.

Students who graduate and go on to post-secondary programs could qualify for Section 504 accommodations.

4. May an IEP team plan a special education program for a student with disabilities to graduate when the student is age 21?

YES. Commensurate with a district's IDEA Part B application and local district practice, a district may provide special education and related services through age 21. A school district must provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to students with disabilities aged 3–18. Students with disabilities age 19–21 do not have to be provided FAPE if the provision of such services is contrary to the school district's IDEA Part B application.

When the student enters high school, the IEP team should identify graduation requirements and length of the program.

DIPLOMAS

1. Are all special education students who are enrolled in public school eligible to receive a diploma?

YES. The IDEA does not require a school district to award a diploma to students identified as having a disability under P.L. 101-476. However, Montana school accreditation standard Rule 10.55.805 Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) states

GRADUATION AGE REQUIREMENTS
IDEA FAPE = AGES 3–18
UNLESS
The school district's policy and narrative specify services through age 21.

that a student who has successfully completed the goals identified on an individualized education program (IEP) shall be awarded a diploma.

The completion of a course of study prescribed under state and local rules should result in a formal recognition of the completion of that study. Diplomas for special education students shall be awarded in the same manner as diplomas are awarded to students without disabilities.

DIPLOMAS

A student with a disability who has successfully completed the goals identified on an individualized education program (IEP) shall be awarded a diploma and attend the same graduation ceremony.

2. May a school district use different wording on the diploma received by a student with a disability?

YES. The language on the diploma may differentiate between the student who "has completed the course of study prescribed by the board of trustees" or who "has completed a prescribed course of study in accord with requirements established by the board of trustees." The diploma awarded to each student must be similar in all significant respects. The student's transcript shall reflect the individual nature of the course of study.

School districts are encouraged to use the same language on all diplomas for all students in the school district. The transcript is the communication mechanism between the school and other agencies.

If a school district offers different types of diplomas based upon a specific course of study, then all diploma options must be available to all students regardless of whether the student has a disability. The requirements for earning a particular type of diploma must be based upon objective criteria specific to the purpose for awarding different diplomas.

3. Can requirements for granting a diploma be waived for students with disabilities?

YES. Each school district shall provide for a waiver of the district established learner outcomes in order to accommodate the needs of special education students. Learner outcomes that are waived must be identified on the student's IEP.

A credit waiver is available under 10.55.906(3)(a) ARM which permits the board of trustees to waive specific course requirements based on individual student needs and performance levels. Waiver requests shall be considered with respect to age, maturity, interest, and aspirations of the student and shall be in consultation with the student's parents or guardians. The IEP team must follow local district board of trustees policy when considering credit waivers for students with disabilities.

Cites: 17 EHLR 288, OSERS on Diplomas, 4/14/89, OSEP on Graduation 11/23/90, 11/1/94, 20 IDELR 103.5
Grades: EHLR 305:49, EHLR 305:50, EHLR 352:112, EHLR 352:156, EHLR 557: 283, 20 IDELR 97

OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
NANCY KEENAN, SUPERINTENDENT
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APPENDIX

The next pages gives appropriate and inappropriate examples of the following documents:

- REPORT CARDS
- TRANSCRIPTS
- CERTIFICATES
- DIPLOMAS

The gray area of each document highlights appropriate or inappropriate language for school districts to consider when modifying or developing their own documents.

Acknowledgments

The Office of Public Instruction acknowledges the contributions of the Task Force for Guidelines on Grades, Graduation, and Diplomas for Students with Disabilities. Further acknowledgment is extended to the Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center for the technical support and resources to prepare this document.

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Inappropriate Certificate

Deer Creek County Schools

Deer Creek Montana

This Certificate is hereby granted to

_____

for completion of a special education individualized educational program in the Logan County Schools.

Given this _____ day of _____ 19____

_____
Chairman, Board of Education

_____
Principal

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_____
Superintendent

_____
Teacher

Appropriate Certificate

Deer Creek County Schools

Deer Creek Montana

This Certificate is hereby granted to

_____

who has completed a course of study prescribed by the board of trustees in the Logan County Schools.

Given this _____ day of _____ 19____

_____
Chairman, Board of Education

_____
Principal

_____
Superintendent

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_____
Teacher

Appropriate Transcript

Mirror Lake High School

3800 South Logan, Englewood, Montana 59011
(303) 761-0894

Transcript printed on 2/3/95

Class of 1995
Birthdate: 9/24/75
Cum GPA: 2.539

Total Credits Earned: 182.50
Class Rank: 151 out of 179

		Term 1		Term 2		Term 3		Term 4	
1990–1991 Englewood High	Basic Art & Design								
	Challenge			C	5.00				
	** Eng 9 GC/LC			B	5.00				
	General Math			D	5.00			C	5.00
	HS Science B			B	5.00			B	5.00
	Mixed Chorus			C	5.00			B	5.00
	SS 9 Econ/Gov			A	5.00				
				C	5.00			B	5.00
1991–1992 Englewood High	** Consumer Math								
	Eng 10 GC			A	5.00			A	5.00
	Eng 10 LS							C	5.00
	Geo/World History							C	5.00
	Human Bio Systems			C	5.00			C	5.00
	Work Experience			B	5.00				
								P	5.00
1992–1993 Englewood High	Algebra 12								
	Contemporary Living			C	10.00				
	English 11			C	5.00				
	Work Experience			IC	0.00				
	Work Experience			P	10.00				
	World History							T	
				C	10.00				
1993–1994 Englewood High	** Accounting 1	A	10.00						
	Earth Science	B	5.00						
	English 11	P	10.00						
	Homebound Geometry	C	5.00						
	Mixed Chorus	B	2.50						
1994–1995 Englewood High	Adult Proficiencies								
	** Algebra 3–4	B-	5.00	B	5.00				
	Creative Foods 1								
	Current Issues								
	English 4	B	5.00	C	5.00				
	Homebound								
	Homebound								
	Homebound								
	Homebound								
	Personal Survival								

** Grade based on modified curriculum

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Inappropriate Transcript

Mirror Lake High School

3800 South Logan, Englewood, Montana 59011
(303) 761-0894

Transcript printed on 2/3/95

Class of 1995
Birthdate: 9/24/75
Cum GPA: 2.539

Total Credits Earned: 182.50
Class Rank: 151 out of 179

		Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4
1990–1991 Englewood High	Basic Art & Design		C 5.00		
	Challenge		B 5.00		
	Special Ed Eng 9 GC/LC		D 5.00		C 5.00
	Resource Math		B 5.00		B 5.00
	HS Science B		C 5.00		B 5.00
	Mixed Chorus		A 5.00		
	SS 9 Econ/Gov		C 5.00		B 5.00
1991–1992 Englewood High	Resource Math		A 5.00		A 5.00
	Eng 10 GC				C 5.00
	Eng 10 LS				C 5.00
	Geo/World History		C 5.00		C 5.00
	Human Bio Systems		B 5.00		
	Work Experience				P 5.00
1992–1993 Englewood High	Algebra 12		C 10.00		
	Contemporary Living		C 5.00		
	Special Education English		IC 0.00		
	Work Experience		P 10.00		
	Work Experience				T
	World History		C 10.00		
1993–1994 Englewood High	Accounting 1	A 10.00			
	Earth Science	B 5.00			
	Special Education English	P 10.00			
	Homebound Geometry	C 5.00			
	Mixed Chorus	B 2.50			
1994–1995 Englewood High	Adult Proficiencies				
	Algebra 3–4	B- 5.00	B 5.00		
	Creative Foods 1				
	Current Issues				
	English 4	B 5.00	C 5.00		
	Section 504 Homebound				
	Section 504 Homebound				
	Section 504 Homebound				
	Section 504 Homebound				
	Personal Survival				

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Appropriate Report Card

STUDENT PROGRESS REPORT

NAME _____ TEACHER _____ SCHOOL _____ GRADE _____ YEAR _____

QUARTER	1	2	3	4	QUARTER	1	2	3	4	PROMOTED TO GRADE
READING					ART					1ST QUARTER COMMENTS:
Effort					MUSIC					
Written Assignments					Conduct					
Class Participation					Rhythmic Competency					
ENGLISH					Pitch accuracy					
Effort					PHYSICAL EDUCATION					
Mechanics/Usage					Effort/Attitude					
Written Expression					Participation					2ND QUARTER COMMENTS:
Oral Language					KEYBOARDING					
Assignments					MODIFIED CURRICULUM					
SPELLING					Reading					
Effort					Language					
Weekly List					Mathematics					
Written Assignments					Social Studies					
PENMANSHIP					Spelling					3RD QUARTER COMMENTS:
MATHEMATICS					COOPERATION					
Effort					Works well with others					
Problem Solving					Participates in class activities					
Computation					Assumes responsibility for own actions					
Basic Facts					Follows school rules					
Tests					COURTESY					
Assignments					Shows self control					4TH QUARTER COMMENTS
SOCIAL STUDIES					Respects others					
Effort					Polite and considerate					
Assignments					WORK HABITS					
Tests					Follows directions					
SCIENCE					Works independently					
Effort					Uses time wisely					CONFERENCE TOPICS:
Assignments					Organizational skills					
Tests					Completes assignments on time					

A — Excellent	✓ — Needs Improvement	ATTENDANCE					PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE:
B — Above Average	S — Satisfactory	DAYS PRESENT					
C — Average	+ — Area of Strength	DAYS ABSENT					
D — Below Average	* — Modified Assignment	TIMES TARDY					
F — Failing	x — Participation						
I — Incomplete	N/A — Not Applicable						

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Inappropriate Report Card

STUDENT PROGRESS REPORT

NAME _____ TEACHER _____ SCHOOL _____ GRADE _____ YEAR _____

QUARTER	1	2	3	4	QUARTER	1	2	3	4	PROMOTED TO GRADE
READING					ART					1ST QUARTER COMMENTS:
Effort					MUSIC					
Written Assignments					Conduct					
Class Participation					Rhythmic Competency					
ENGLISH					Pitch accuracy					
Effort					PHYSICAL EDUCATION					
Mechanics/Usage					Effort/Attitude					
Written Expression					Participation					2ND QUARTER COMMENTS:
Oral Language					KEYBOARDING					
Assignments					SPECIAL EDUCATION					
SPELLING					Resource Room Reading					
Effort					Resource Room Language					
Weekly List					Resource Room Mathematics					
Written Assignments					Resource Room Social Studies					
PENMANSHIP					Resource Room Spelling					3RD QUARTER COMMENTS:
MATHEMATICS					COOPERATION					
Effort					Works well with others					
Problem Solving					Participates in class activities					
Computation					Assumes responsibility for own actions					
Basic Facts					Follows school rules					
Tests					COURTESY					
Assignments					Shows self control					4TH QUARTER COMMENTS
SOCIAL STUDIES					Respects others					
Effort					Polite and considerate					
Assignments					WORK HABITS					
Tests					Follows directions					
SCIENCE					Works independently					
Effort					Uses time wisely					CONFERENCE TOPICS:
Assignments					Organizational skills					
Tests					Completes assignments on time					

A — Excellent	✔ — Needs Improvement	ATTENDANCE					PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE:
B — Above Average	S — Satisfactory	DAYS PRESENT					
C — Average	+ — Area of Strength	DAYS ABSENT					
D — Below Average	* — Modified Assignment	TIMES TARDY					
F — Failing	x — Participation						
I — Incomplete	N/A — Not Applicable						

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Inappropriate Report Card

EAGLE HIGH SCHOOL
REPORT CARD
January 24, 1995 – March 22, 1995

STUDENT: John Doe TERM 3 CREDITS EARNED: 20.0 GRADE:10

DOB: March 5, 1981 TERM 3 GPA 2.500 COUNSELOR: ANN HUTCHINSON

Course	Teacher	Academic Grade-Credits Earned		Attendance** Grade-Times Absent		
US Hist 11	Anderson	C-	5.0	S	O	
Work Exp	Covey	NC				
PE 3	Howard	A	2.5	S	O	
Weight Training	Penn	A	2.5	S	O	
Biology	Ronco	D-	5.0	S	3	Grade based upon Individual Education Program
Creative Foods 1	Wirth	B	5.0	S	0	
Special Ed Math	Jones	A-	5.0	S	0	
Resource English	Lee	B+	5.0	S	0	

**ATTENDANCE GRADE: S: Satisfactory compliance

U: Unsatisfactory compliance

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Appropriate Report Card

EAGLE HIGH SCHOOL
REPORT CARD

STUDENT: John Doe | TERM 3 CREDITS EARNED: 20.0 | GRADE:10

DOB: March 5, 1981 | TERM 3 GPA 2.500 | COUNSELOR: ANN HUTCHINSON

Course	Teacher	Academic Grade-Credits Earned		Attendance** Grade-Times Absent		
*US Hist 11	Anderson	C-	5.0	S	O	
Work Exp	Covey	NC				
PE 3	Howard	A	2.5	S	O	
Weight Training	Penn	A	2.5	S	O	
*Biology	Ronco	D-	5.0	S	3	Grade reflects teacher collaboration
Creative Foods 1	Wirth	B	5.0	S	0	
*Basic Math	Jones	A-	5.0	S	0	
*Collaborative English	Lee	B+	5.0	S	0	

**ATTENDANCE GRADE: S: Satisfactory compliance

U: Unsatisfactory compliance

* Grade based on modified curriculum

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Appropriate Diploma

Big River County High School

Blue Lake, Montana

This Certifies That

has completed a Course of Study prescribed by the board of trustees
from this High School and is hereby awarded this

Diploma

In Witness Thereof, the seal of Big River County High School and
the signatures of the school officials are hereunto affixed.
Given this month of May, nineteen hundred and ninty-five.

SUPERINTENDENT

CHAIRMAN OF BOARD

PRINCIPAL

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Inappropriate Diploma

Big River County High School

Blue Lake, Montana

This Certifies That

has completed a Course of Study prescribed by the special education program
from this High School and is hereby awarded this

Diploma

In Witness Thereof, the seal of Big River County High School and
the signatures of the school officials are hereunto affixed.
Given this month of May, nineteen hundred and ninty-five.

SUPERINTENDENT

CHAIRMAN OF BOARD

PRINCIPAL

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